School Choice Advocates Win in South Carolina, Utah

By Karla Dial

Though conservative voters woke up to a newly “blue” world on November 8, the results of the midterm election could mean two states will soon have more school choice.

In South Carolina, where a sweeping school choice bill that would have provided a mixture of tax credits and vouchers for low-income and special-needs children failed to pass in the state House of Representatives by only seven votes earlier this year, school choice was such a hot topic it even permeated the race for state treasurer.

“The incumbent treasurer slammed [Republican challenger] Thomas Ravenel for supporting school choice because he said it would decimate the treasury,” explained Randy Page, president of South Carolinians for Responsible Government, a conservative lobbying group in Charleston. “He sent an e-mail to teachers across the state saying they need to support him to keep public schools solvent.”

Tight Races
Ravenel ousted his opponent, as did five other Republicans in races for

Activists Battle Mental Health Screening Law

By Fran Eaton

Two years after a new law was passed in Illinois creating the framework for schools to screen students for mental health disorders, the state has saved more than $44 million in hospital costs, according to a report released in early October.

But some groups say the alleged cost savings do not justify a program under which schools are overstepping their authority. They also say it imposes a mandatory, universal plan to screen all

Special-Needs Scholarship Proposed in Ky.

By Mary Susan Littlepage
Kentucky state Rep. Stan Lee (R-Lexington) proposed a school choice bill for special-needs students this fall. If it passes, it will be the first school choice program of any kind in the state.

Lee’s plan would let parents of special-needs children use scholarships to send their kids to other public schools or participating private schools for

Ohio Justices Tilt to Charter Schools

By Scott Stephens
Ohio’s network of publicly funded, privately operated charter schools is constitutional, a sharply split Ohio Supreme Court ruled on October 25.

The 4-3 ruling was a big win for charter school operators and removes the uncertainty that dogged the state’s 305 charter schools and the 72,000 students who attend them.

“This decision lifts a cloud that was hanging over the program,” said Chad Readler, the lawyer who defended against the suit on behalf of about 100 charter school operators. “This decision allows all schools to return their focus to

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Professor Sean Foreman at North Miami’s Union Institute & University says, “Students usually find it to be an eye-opener.” The Woodbury Junior High School Social Studies Department in Minnesota calls it the “world’s smartest political quiz.”

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MILTON FRIEDMAN • JULY 31, 1912 - NOVEMBER 16, 2006

School Choice Movement Mourns Founder

By Karla Dial

When Milton Friedman died on November 16 at the age of 94, the school choice movement lost its founder.

Friedman, whose work as an economist earned him the Nobel Prize in 1976, believed in small government and letting the market do its work in all areas of the economy. In a 1955 essay, “On the Role of Government in Education,” Friedman turned his discerning eye on public education, writing that vouchers that follow the child would improve education by promoting competition between schools.

National Movement

Fifty-one years later, that idea has become a national movement.

“Among the greatest champions of freedom in all of history, Milton Friedman was a giant. His greatest legacy is the tens of thousands of children who now attend high-quality schools because of the idea of school choice that Dr. Friedman pioneered in 1955,” said Clint Bolick, president of the Alliance for School Choice.

“He leaves that precious legacy to a new generation of leaders who must nurture and expand it,” Bolick continued. “I will personally miss a dear friend, but he will serve eternally for me and countless others as a source of towering inspiration.”

George Clowes, a senior fellow at The Heartland Institute and former managing editor of this publication, interviewed Friedman in 1998.

“He was very courteous, although he did correct me when I suggested he was a conservative,” Clowes recalled. “Vouchers are needed in K-12 education, he said, to eliminate the competitive disadvantage private schools face in providing an alternative to government schools. The most direct way of doing that, he said, is through a system of vouchers.

“If you’re trying to go into the business of selling chocolate and somebody down the street is taking money from you in order to give chocolates away,’ then you’ve got a difficult time making a business out of that,’ he said,” noted Clowes.

Intelectual Giant

Though he stood only 5 feet, 3 inches, Friedman was an intellectual giant whom many found intimidating—though sometimes only momentarily.

“The first time I met Milton was at a Friedman Foundation conference in San Francisco back in 1998,’ recalled Andrew Coulson, director of the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom. “I received a last-minute invitation to share the stage with Milton, [his wife] Rose, and [economist] Thomas Sowell because Milton had read the unfinished manuscript for [my book] Market Education: The Unknown History and wanted me to say a few words about it.

“We hadn’t spoken together before going on stage, and just as they were about to switch on our microphones, Milton leaned over and said something like, ‘I thought I was about to have my as-yet-unreleased manuscript carved up by a Nobel laureate economist in front of several hundred people.

“Then he smiled and added, ‘but we can talk about that later.’ And so we did, on and off, ever since. Milton was kind, candid, generous with his time, and displayed remarkable personal integrity. I’ll miss him,’ said Coulson.

“When Milton Friedman died on November 16 at the age of 94, the school choice movement lost its founder.”

Down-to-Earth

That, perhaps, is what those who had the pleasure of meeting him will remember most about Friedman.

“His ideas, energy, and reputation all was hailed the world over, by scientists and heads of state alike, Friedman remained down-to-earth until the end. ‘His ideas, energy, and reputation all played major roles in the creation of The Heartland Institute—the first free-market ‘think tank’ devoted to a particular state’s public policy issues—in 1984,’ said Heartland Institute founder and President Joe Bast. ‘Today there are some 40 similar think tanks, and Heartland has moved on to become a national organization. We are all Milton Friedman’s legacy.

Over the years, Dr. Friedman was generous toward me with his advice and assistance, providing often-lengthy comments on books and policy study manuscripts, recommending that students and academics contact me, and encouraging me in many ways,’ Bast said. ‘He was always generous with his time, never harsh or judgmental in his criticism, and always optimistic. He was a teacher, a mentor, and a philosophical touchstone that could be counted on, no matter how stormy the political climate might be.’

Bast noted Friedman’s historical importance, saying, “Few people actually change the course of history; fewer still change it in positive ways, ways that benefit the lives of millions and even billions of people. Milton Friedman was such a person. It was an incredible honor to have known and worked with him.”

Karla Dial (dial@heartland.org) is managing editor of School Reform News.

INTERNET INFO

A collection of tributes to Milton Friedman, video clips, and links to some of his work is available on The Heartland Institute’s Web site at http://www.heartland.org/friedman.cfm.
Elections in Which School Choice Played Key Role

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<td>Supports choice and charters.</td>
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<td>Education Chief</td>
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<td>Arkansas</td>
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<td>California</td>
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<td>Florida</td>
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<td>Charlie Crist, R</td>
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<td>Supports charters</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hawaii</td>
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<td>Supports charters</td>
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<td>Idaho</td>
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<td>C.L. “Butch” Otter, R</td>
<td>Supports charters, choice</td>
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<td>Supports parental involvement, choice, and charters.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
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<td>Supports charters</td>
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<td>Iowa</td>
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<td>Supports choice, charters</td>
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<td>Maine</td>
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<td>Massachusetts</td>
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<td>Dick DeVos, R</td>
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<td>Sen. Trent Lott, R</td>
<td>Supports choice, charters</td>
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<td>Missouri</td>
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<td>Supports choice, charters</td>
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<td>Montana</td>
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<td>Sen. Conrad Burns, R</td>
<td>Supports charters, choice</td>
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<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>U.S. Senate</td>
<td>Peter Ricketts, R</td>
<td>Supports charters, charters,</td>
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<td>Nevada</td>
<td>U.S. Senate</td>
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<td>New Hampshire</td>
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<td>Jim Coburn, R</td>
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<td>New Mexico</td>
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<td>John Dendahl, R</td>
<td>Strong advocate for tax scholarship programs</td>
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<td>Allen McCulloch, R</td>
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<td>Supports parental choice in education</td>
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<td>Governor</td>
<td>John Faso, R</td>
<td>Supports lifting charter school cap, tax credit scholarships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Ken Blackwell, R</td>
<td>Supports all forms of school choice</td>
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<td>U.S. Senate</td>
<td>Sen. Mike DeWine, R</td>
<td></td>
<td>Supports charters, choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
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<td>Robert Lange, R</td>
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<td>Supports education savings accounts, charters, expanding Milwaukee voucher program statewide, tuition tax credits for higher education</td>
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Compiled through original research. The Center for Education Reform provided information on gubernatorial and U.S. Senate races.
Mental Health

Continued from page 1

children from birth through 18.
The opposition has assumed greater urgency now that federal grants for implementing the law are beginning to materialize.

With psychological studies indicating one in five children is either anxious, moody, or disruptive, some educators and lawmakers focused on children’s mental health issues are convinced public policy must address the issue. Without early intervention and effective treatment, they say, those children may fail in school, be unable to find acceptable employment, and thus face poverty in adulthood.

“Two years after a new law was passed in Illinois creating the framework for schools to screen students for mental health disorders, ... some groups say the alleged cost savings do not justify a program under which schools are overstepping their authority.”

State Standards

The Illinois law integrates Social and Emotional Learning Standards into the state’s public school system. The standards outline grade-specific, measurable performance on social and emotional development expectations for Illinois children under age 18.

Every school district in the state is required to integrate the standards into its curricula.

Those with the funding to implement the standards are required to use them in their annual assessments; the Illinois Children’s Mental Health Partnership told Gov. Rod Blagojevich (D) in its annual report, released October 10.

Wrong Role

Under the Children’s Mental Health Act of 2003, more than 15,226 Illinois schoolchildren were screened in 2005 for “mental health crises”—sometimes verbally, and other times through a computerized touch-screen survey, to ascertain feelings of depression, isolation, whether they are being bullied, and other personal questions.

Of those surveyed, 5,342 low-risk youth were “able to be stabilized and served in their community,” saving taxpayers $44.1 million in hospitalization costs, according to the report.

But many mental health professionals and parents’ rights groups argue this is not a proper role for the schools. Opponents of the law say a better approach is to let private medical insurers cover the services and to increase public assistance for mental health care for the uninsured, as well as ensuring only qualified people assess the students and guard their private information.

Concerns over Stigma

Lee Carty, communications director for the Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, a 34-year-old Washington, DC-based advocacy group for the mentally disabled, said the two main concerns over school-based mental health screening are the potential to stigmatize students by inaccurately assessing them as having mental health problems, and using available funds solely to screen, rather than to financially assist, those who have serious mental health needs.

“Ideally, mental health screening is one issue, but providing them with needed services is something completely different,” Carty said. “Schools shouldn’t be screening children—qualified mental health professionals should be.”

One of the Bazelon Center’s key concerns is to reduce the stigma of mental health care. The Bush administration rooted its 2002 New Freedom Commission on Mental Health in advocates’ concerns that children were being unfairly stigmatized by their unmet needs. The commission’s goal of identifying and eliminating unfair policies ushered in children’s mental health acts nationwide.

In 2003, Illinois was one of the first states to pass such a law. Although the Bazelon Center opposes mandatory screening in schools, the group advocates ensuring those who have been diagnosed with mental disorders get the proper treatment.

“Parents, teachers, and others may fear that once identified, a mental health diagnosis will influence the way a child is treated,” the Bazelon Center states on its Web site. “Parents may also fear they will be blamed for their child’s mental disability. As a result, families may not seek services.”

Irate Parents

Many psychologists, pediatricians, and parental rights advocates, as well as parents themselves, say the law should show more concern for privacy and family rights.

In 2006, proposals to require schools to obtain written parental consent before screening a minor for mental health were stonewalled in the Illinois legislature.

A sponsor of the original bill, state Rep. Patti Bellock (R-Hinsdale), worked with pro-family groups in the most recent legislative session to amend the bill to require parental involvement. Parents’ rights advocates had pointed out Bellock’s legislation did not specifically require parental consent for screening when the bill passed three years ago.

“While we want to make sure those children needing mental health care are not overlooked, it is important that parents be involved,” Bellock said.

The amendment failed to reach a floor vote in the Senate. At press time, Bellock had no concrete plans to reintroduce it, saying a public education effort is needed first.

Fran Eaton (featon@illinoисreview.com) is a freelance journalist based in Chicago who reports on family issues and education alternatives.

Mental Health Laws Pose Growing Threat, Parents Say

Illinois may have been the first state to pass a law making mental health screenings a regular part of the public school system, but it’s not the only one. Earlier this year, similar laws were passed in Michigan and New York, and one in Indiana is already the subject of a federal lawsuit.

Two years ago, Michael and Theresa Rhoads’ 15-year-old daughter came home from her Mishawaka, Indiana school and asked about two mental disorders a computerized program called TeenScreen had determined she had. Outraged over what they saw as an invasion of their daughter’s privacy, the Rhoads sought legal counsel from the Rutherford Institute, a civil liberties legal group based in Tennessee.

A fierce storm followed as mental health screening became the topic of local talk shows. Parents led a charge against the Indiana measure. State Rep. Jackie Walorski (R-Lakeville) is now working to repeal Indiana’s two-year-old children’s mental health program, which was modeled after Illinois’.

Parental rights advocates statewide were encouraged in late October when the Indiana Mental Health Committee opposed mandatory screening for the state’s children, although it did recommend the state board of education continue to address mental health issues. The overall effect of the decision was basically to water down the program.

Growing Threat to Privacy

In October, Karen Hayes, director of the Illinois chapter of Concerned Women for America, and Minnesota pediatrician Dr. Karen Effrem went to Washington, DC to share with federal lawmakers their concerns about the Federal Mental Health Action Agenda—a collaboration of several federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education, and Social Security Administration.

The federal government lays out a blueprint for destigmatizing mental health disorders through programs such as TeenScreen, the computerized touch-screen survey that diagnosed the Rhoads’ daughter.

Hayes and Effrem expressed concern that state by state, children’s mental health screening could develop into an insurmountable and inescapable national program over time.

“The Federal Mental Health Action Agenda has resulted in the promotion of a whole series of federal grants and programs to the states for the mental health screening and intervention of children beginning in infancy, despite documented problems with the scientific validity, safety, effectiveness, and cost of both the screening and the associated interventions,” Effrem told lawmakers.

“In addition, there are grave concerns regarding whether the federal government should be involved in something that has such profound implications for individual autonomy, parental authority, freedom of conscience, and privacy,” Effrem said.

Parents should guide their children’s physical and psychological health care, Effrem said. As a pediatrician, she believes decisions about a child’s care are between the parents and their chosen physician, and should not involve the government.

— Fran Eaton
California Schools Adopting E-Tools, but Teacher Unions Are Wary: Study

By Daschell M. Phillips

On September 26, the University of California and California Department of Education released the Golden State’s first statewide study of virtual schools and e-tools for education.

The study, “The State of Online Learning in California: A Look at Current K-12 Policies and Practices,” concluded the expansion of online education in California mirrors advances across the country, as states from Florida to Washington offer myriad online education options for students. But the report also identified several problems with the state’s adoption of new technologies.

“The report started out as an ad hoc committee to find out what was happening with virtual tools in schools throughout the state of California,” explained coauthor Harold Vietti, who runs an online school called the eScholar Academy, based in Red Bluff, California.

Vietti said California schools are using virtual tools in many ways, such as providing more computer access in schools and using vendor- or self-designed educational programs. The tools are most popular among schools serving fewer than 2,000 students, along with charter schools.

“On September 26, the University of California and California Department of Education released the Golden State’s first statewide study of virtual schools.”

Facing Hurdles

Virtual schools take many forms, ranging from educational software used at home or in computer centers or classrooms, to schools whose entire curricula require the use of e-tools such as phones, computers, and software that allow students to interact remotely with teachers in real time. Although California offers online Advanced Placement (AP) classes, credit recovery courses, and online charter schools, Vietti said bureaucracy has prevented California from making online education especially helpful to at-risk and special-education students, Youngblood said.

“Teachers are more, if not equally, important in virtual schools than in the classroom,” Vietti said. “My teachers work about eight to 10 hours a day, working with students online, including weekends and holidays.”

Kevin Youngblood, president of OdysseyWare, Inc., a Web-based curriculum company in Arizona, said educational software isn’t designed to replace teachers but to help them enhance children’s learning experiences.

“Learning can be delivered in a variety of ways,” Youngblood said. “We offer a tool in a teacher’s toolbox.”

Increasing Access

Youngblood, whose software is used by students enrolled in approximately 100 virtual schools nationwide, said students have access to OdysseyWare courses online at any time.

That flexibility is what makes online education especially helpful to at-risk and special-education students, Youngblood said.

“Virtual schools work better for [these] students than traditional schools because individualized learning allows students to work at their own pace,” Youngblood said. “They can work around other things in their lives and can access other resources to help them.”

Developing the Future

Another concern outlined in the study was a fear that heavy reliance on online tools will widen the gap between students who have regular access to the Internet and those who do not—a concern Vietti said serves as an excuse for California’s educational system to stay behind the times.

“Everyone can have access to computers,” Vietti said. “The cost of computers is going down, and instead of buying books, schools should be buying computers. We are not preparing students for the 8-to-5 office work week—we are preparing them for what the world might look like years down the road.”

The future workplace, Vietti said, may include conducting business on cell phones in the park or grading papers on the beach in Hawaii—something that isn’t as universal across all industries today as it will be when today’s students reach adulthood.

Daschell M. Phillips (dashwriter@aol.com) is a freelance writer in Chicago.
Higher Ed Reforms Face Tough Slog

By Neal McCluskey

On September 27, one day after U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced major plans to reform American postsecondary education, a panel of higher education analysts, stakeholders, and advocates—this author included—convened at the Cato Institute in Washington, DC to debate her proposals.

If our discussion was any indication, renovating America’s ivory tower is going to be a tough job. The secretary’s proposals fell under much criticism at the Cato panel and elsewhere.

Creating a Commission

Spellings’ road to reform started in September 2005, when she appointed a commission to formulate a “national strategy” for American higher education. Charles Miller, a friend of Spellings and President George W. Bush who had helped craft Texas’ predecessor to the No Child Left Behind Act, and who once chaired the University of Texas board of regents, was named the group’s chairman.

The rest of the commission was composed of current and former university presidents, heads of higher education advocacy groups, and representatives from corporations such as IBM and Boeing. For nearly a year the commission tackled numerous topics in hearings around the country.

At the end of August 2006, all but one commission member voted to approve a final report that called for increasing aid to poor students, encouraging colleges to measure student learning over time, and creating a federal database with information on every postsecondary student in the nation.

Preparing a Response

A month passed between the report’s approval and its presentation to the secretary, but Spellings started planning her response well before its official release. When Spellings received the report on September 26, she had a plan ready to go. She announced the administration would focus primarily on better aligning high school curricula with college entry requirements, increasing need-based financial aid, and creating a database to track the performance of every college student—and therefore every college—in the country.

Miller was the first speaker at Cato’s event. He stressed the need to gather and publicize as much data on colleges as possible, with the goal of enabling students, parents, and policymakers to make informed decisions about higher education.

“It’s necessary to have an information system which provides results and identifies behavior related to those results,” Miller said. “Currently, higher education is replete with opaque, complex information systems which are not informative.”

Spellings announced major plans to reform American postsecondary education, a panel of higher education analysts, stakeholders, and advocates—this author included—convened at the Cato Institute in Washington, DC to debate her proposals.

Publicizing Personal Data

The problem with Miller’s focus, and with the database both the commission and Spellings endorsed, is that it would require schools to furnish information many institutions and students consider private.

In addition, the threat that the federal government might eventually require schools to give standardized tests to all students troubles many colleges, especially private schools that value their autonomy.

Christopher Nelson, president of Saint John’s College in Annapolis, Maryland, made those fears clear at the Cato event, voicing an opinion the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities had been articulating long before the report’s release.

“We should promote the desire to learn over the mania to test performance,” Nelson said.

Aiding and Abetting

The second major hurdle for higher education reformers will be to address what is likely the ivory tower’s greatest problem: affordability. How do you ground tuition prices that for decades have been out of touch with prices, so that lending companies such as Sallie Mae are making huge profits off of them.

Increasing Federal Aid

To make college more affordable for all Americans, Kamenetz called not just for the expansion of Pell Grants but also for the replacement of federal programs that back loans from lending companies, with initiatives that give federal money directly to students.

“It’s really an elephant in the room when you talk about issues like transparency and accountability,” Kamenetz said.

That is the external system that is fed by the federal financial aid programs that cause very large companies to make very large amounts of profits off of growing student loans.

The federal government, however, has been increasing overall aid availability for decades, yet college prices keep rising. Indeed, as I argued at the event, such aid could very well be the problem.

As long as it keeps on rising to keep up with prices, schools have no incentives to keep their tuition increases small.

Public realization of that, colliding with students’ and schools’ desires to keep aid coming, might easily spell even greater gridlock for ivory tower reform than disputes over federal data collection and No Child Left Behind for colleges.

Together, these problems leave very much in doubt whether anyone in Washington will be able to renovate the nation’s ivory tower.

Neal McCluskey (nmccluskey@cato.org) is a policy analyst at the Cato Institute’s Center for Educational Freedom.

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INTERNET INFO


Transfers Affect Everyone

Discipline, amount of homework surprise many after moving from low-rated schools

By Jennifer Mrozowski

Transferring from a 660-student public school to a 47-student private one was a big shock for Kayla Beber. At her old school, the sixth-grader had lots of friends, liked her teacher, and didn’t have much homework. At Christ Emmanuel Christian Academy in East Walnut Hills, preparing for college is daily, hard work.

Kayla, 11, is one of 830 Cincinnati students taking advantage of a new state program that allows kids in poorly performing public schools to transfer to private schools at no cost to them. Students get state-funded vouchers worth up to $5,000 to pay the private school tuition. Parents whose children are assigned to low-rated schools no longer have to feel stuck.

New Digs

Eight weeks after the program began, Ohio figured to spend $10 million on a voucher program to assist 3,141 students across the state. Locally, students assigned to 17 Cincinnati Public Schools were eligible. They make up the largest number of voucher recipients of any district in the state.

All over town, the impact is widening: Dozens of private schools are adjusting to hundreds of new students. Public and charter schools are coping with student losses and the millions of dollars in state funding that went with the kids.

Children are navigating new schools and trying to make new friends, while adjusting to new discipline codes and challenging coursework. Some kids are encountering religion classes, perhaps for the first time.

“My old school was way bigger than my new school,” Kayla says. But size is just the start of it.

“I would usually see a fight every day,” Kayla says of life at John P. Parker School, a low-rated Cincinnati Public School in Madisonville, where 100 students took vouchers and left.

New Curricula

Change is happening all over. At St. Francis Seraph School in Over-the-Rhine, enrollment increased from about 150 students last year to 169 this year, including 21 voucher recipients. Students are learning the tough discipline policies of Principal Wanda Hill and why she refers to her office as “boot camp.”

At St. Boniface School in Northside, with 29 voucher recipients, enrollment jumped from 150 to 170. Principal Sister Ann Gorman held open houses and a breakfast to help students fit in.

At John P. Parker School, Kayla’s old school, the exodus of 100 students helped lead to the loss of eight staff positions, including teachers and instructional aides.

Parker is rated in “Academic Emergency,” the state’s lowest grade for achievement. Teacher turnover was so great last year that Kayla’s fifth-grade class had three different teachers. Still Kayla begged her mother, Chanda Heard, to stay at the only school she had ever attended.

“She was extremely apprehensive and then teary-eyed the first couple of weeks,” says Heard, who enrolled another daughter and a niece at Christ Emmanuel, too. Heard also has an 11th-grade daughter at Walnut Hills High School and an eighth-grade son who was at Walnut Hills but returned to Parker because of slipping grades.

New Challenges

The Rev. Carol Dantley, Christ Emmanuel’s principal, says she expected some new students to struggle. The changes affect staff, too, she says.

School enrollment jumped by 50 percent this year, from 30 to 47 students. Most of the increase was because of the voucher program, which pays tuition that varies from $2,800 to $3,550 a year, depending on grade. Despite its benefit to certain schools, the voucher program has come with challenges. Notably, most private schools [had] not received state voucher payments expected [in October]. Some schools also are experiencing overcrowding.

Cincinnati Junior Academy in Clifton, which saw enrollment more than triple from 19 students last year to 65 this year, is at capacity. Adding any more students will mean taking away the library to use for a classroom, Principal Sherree Herdman says. Herdman instead is considering adding classroom trailers to make room for more children.

Schools like Christ Emmanuel are getting by on their old budgets and staffing levels. Like last year, the school has just four teachers. The $45,000 in voucher money expected from the state eventually may help pay for additional supplies, support staff, and technology, but not yet, Dantley says.

New Standards

Many students also are behind their...
grade levels, Dantley says. “The amount of homework itself has been overwhelming to many children. The message is, ‘This is the standard. This is what you are going to meet, but we will help you get there.’”

Dantley says she turned away a handful of students because she worried they would not be successful.

She says the staff now is working hard with the new students. If a child is stuck on something, the teacher works with the student until he understands. That’s the beauty of having small classes of just 12 to 14 kids, Dantley says. She also calls children aside to offer support. Kayla says she was one.

“She really got me going in the school,” Kayla says. “She said not to be afraid and that I was smart. Every time she saw me looking gloomy or down, she took me aside and said, ‘Kayla, you can do it.’

“830 Cincinnati students [are] taking advantage of a new state program that allows kids in poorly performing public schools to transfer to private schools at no cost to them.”

New ‘Families’
Other schools are working to help new students adjust as well.

At St. Boniface School in Northside, students are organizing themselves in ‘families.’ Older students are assigned to help younger students, and seventh- and eighth-graders walk hand-in-hand with kindergartners and first-graders to Mass.

For Catholic schools, the voucher program is welcome after years of declining enrollment. But the program has not been the boon that some thought it would be.

Locally, more than 7,000 students were eligible for the voucher program in this first year, but only 830 took advantage. Catholic schools enrolled about 580 of the voucher recipients but still, enrollment was down. Some 48,358 kids were enrolled on the first day of school in Archdiocese of Cincinnati schools, a 2 percent drop from last year.

Still, Brother Joe Kamis, the Archdiocese’s superintendent, says the program is bringing much-needed money to his schools. Tuitions vary so widely that he couldn’t estimate how much the schools will receive in voucher money this year.

He knows the schools will welcome the cash. “We were running good programs but with classes that were half-full. To bring in five new students doesn’t really cost anything,” Kamis says.

Jennifer Mrozowski (jmrozowski@enquirer.com) is a staff writer at the Cincinnati Enquirer. This article originally appeared in the October 8 edition of the newspaper. Reprinted with permission.

Cincinnati Public Schools Lose Students to Vouchers

Cincinnati Public Schools lost 510 students this year to vouchers. The remaining voucher recipients are kindergartners or charter students who would have been assigned to the poor-performing schools. District Superintendent Rosa Blackwell declined to be interviewed about vouchers because of a scheduling issue, district spokeswoman Janet Walsh said.

The student losses could cost the system about $3.3 million in state aid, according to the Ohio Department of Education.

At Parker, Kayla’s old school, enrollment dropped from 660 students last year to 515 this year, according to an unofficial count. Voucher recipients represented most of the enrollment drop, and the overall decline caused the school to revise its budget from $4.16 million to $3.33 million, Walsh says.

Changing Ways
Teacher Patsy Holmes says the changes have been difficult. Parker lost eight of 41 teaching positions at the beginning of the year. The shuffle of teachers, who were sent to other schools with vacancies, caused a disruption to students, Holmes says. Classes also are larger, she adds.

But Walsh says the district’s schools aren’t concentrating on their losses. Instead, they are working to improve academics.

Parker, for instance, has more teacher development and coaching this year. Teachers are working in teams and with mentors.

“Cincinnati Public Schools has a game plan for improving student achievement in the voucher schools and the schools not affected by the voucher program,” Walsh says. All schools, she says, “but especially those struggling with student achievement, are getting intensive support at the schoolhouse.”

Returning Students
Yet the disruption continues at some schools, like Parker, which first had to adjust to a loss of students and now are seeing some return. Overall, 41 voucher recipients have come back to Cincinnati Public Schools or never followed through with a voucher, Walsh says.

Holmes says some students returned to Parker because the school offers better services for students with special needs than many private schools. And unlike private schools, she says, the public district doesn’t turn children away.

While the public and private schools work out their challenges, students continue to adjust.

Kayla says she misses her friends from Parker, but she likes her new school more. She has been recognized at Christ Emmanuel, receiving a star for responsibility, and she recently achieved the top score on a science test of all the sixth-, seventh- and eighth-graders.

“I love Christ Emmanuel,” Kayla says. “The teachers are very nice, and if I don’t understand something, they stick with it until I understand.

“The teachers really pay attention to you because they don’t have to walk around stopping fights all the time. Now that I’m going to Christ Emmanuel, I see that’s not how school should be.”

— Jennifer Mrozowski
Cincinnati Enquirer
Protests Call for Public School Exodus

By Michael Coulter

H uston lawyer Bruce Shortt refers to himself as an ordinary guy who “lives in flyover country.” But he has an unusual pastime that has attracted both critics and supporters: He’s working to encourage parents to “leave behind” public schools.

Shortt said if parents take their Christian beliefs seriously, they will do everything possible to ensure their children get a thoroughly Christian education. A growing segment of the faith community is joining Shortt’s call for an exodus, saying that public schools are hostile to their values and unresponsive to their concerns.

They claim to be responsible for most of the 1 million children nationwide now being homeschooled.

“As Christian parents, we have an obligation to provide our children with a Christian education, but unfortunately, Christians have developed a government school habit,” Shortt explained.

“The purpose of the resolutions is to force parents and pastors to confront our disobedience in the education of our children and its consequences. Government schools are destroying our children spiritually, morally, and intellectually. We need to create a new public education system—a system that is ‘public’ in that it is open to all, but that is owned and controlled by parents and the church.”

Encouraging Exodus

In 2004, 2005, and 2006, Shortt helped introduce at the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC)—a convention of cooperating Southern Baptist churches—a resolution encouraging parents to remove their children from public schools and provide them with a Christian education at home or in a Christian school.

Southern Baptists are the largest Protestant denomination in the United States, with 17 million members. Though prominent members supported Shortt’s resolution all three years, it has yet to be adopted.

“The courts say no creationism, no prayer in public schools,” Roger Moran, a member of the SBC executive committee who cosponsored the resolution this year, told CNN in early September. “Humanism and evolution can be taught, but everything I believe is disallowed.”

Getting the Message Out

In 2005, Shortt also took his cause to state organizations of Southern Baptist churches, introducing state versions of the resolution he introduced at the national convention in 25 state conventions.

This year, a resolution urging an exodus from public schools was considered in 48 state conventions. It’s a method, Shortt suggested, that allows him “to get the message to the grassroots” of his denomination. During the time in which he has worked on these resolutions, he said, he “has seen a substantial increase in interest in the issue.”

Shortt, who has a law degree from Harvard and a doctorate in philosophy of science from Stanford University, has written a book, The Harsh Truth about Public Schools (Chalcedon/Ross House Books, 2004), which he hopes will encourage Christians of all denominations to take their children out of public schools. The 500-page book has 75 pages of references to studies and reports about public schools.

Urging Presbyterians

Shortt might be one of the loudest voices calling for people of faith to boycott public schools, but he’s not the only one.

The Rev. Steven Warhurst, associate pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Kingsport, Tennessee, has taken up a similar cause in his own denomination, the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). With more than 1,200 churches and 300,000 members, the PCA is the largest of the seven conservative Presbyterian denominations.

At the denomination’s 2005 national meeting, known as the General Assembly, Warhurst introduced a resolution urging parents to remove their children from public schools. The resolution failed to receive a majority of votes. But since then, the procedure has changed for resolutions to be considered at the General Assembly, so Warhurst is now working through regional bodies of the denomination, known as presbyteries, to have similar resolutions considered. If a presbytery passes a resolution, it will then be considered by the whole denomination.

“We are a lot of calls of support,” Warhurst said. “I think there’s a small movement [that is] supportive of these sentiments.”

Speaking at Churches

Warhurst said he has spoken at many churches in his denomination, urging parents to get serious about Christian education and to teach their children at home or send them to schools that will provide a Christian education.

“These resolutions] have certainly raised some controversy, but it has started the debate,” Warhurst said.

“In Missouri, I’ve been able to raise the support of a prominent member of his denomination. The Rev. Dr. D. James Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Coral Gables, Florida, who teaches political science at Grove City College, has expressed his support for homeschooling and Christian education.”

Acknowledging Contributions

Both Shortt and Warhurst cite the important role of Ray Moore and the organization he heads, Exodus Mandate, in promoting this movement.

A retired military chaplain, pastor, and political activist, Moore has helped draft resolutions and actions in several denominations. He’s also the author of a book, Let the Children Go: Why Children Must Be Removed from Public Schools NOW (Ambassador-Emerald International, 2002), and he has produced a video by the same name.

Exodus Mandate maintains a Web site, http://www.exodusmandate.org, with many documents, audio interviews, and links to other sites that promote Christian schools and homeschooling, as well as information about public schools’ shortcomings.

German Court Says Parents May Not Educate Children

By Michael Coulter

G erman law has lost its last legal appeal on September 11, 2006 when the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) allowed to stand a German Federal Constitutional Court (FCC) decision from November 2005 stating parents do not have a right to educate their children at home.

The case involved Fritz and Marianna Konrad, a Herbolzheim couple that wanted to homeschool their two children because they believed the public schools undermined their religious values.

In their legal battle to homeschool, the Konrads lost several court cases, including the one they appealed to Germany’s highest court, the Federal Constitutional Court.

The American-based Home School Legal Defense Association reports approximately 500 children are homeschooled in Germany. Several parents who have attempted to homeschool have been fined and imprisoned because they have not complied with compulsory school attendance laws.

State Indoctrination

The Konrads appealed the German court’s decision to the ECHR, a special court that enforces the European Convention of Human Rights. They cited Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 of the Convention, which says, “the state shall respect the right of parents to send their children to schools of their own religious and philosophical convictions.”

The ECHR stated in its Konrad and Others vs. German Decision opinion that the German FCC had attributed to balance individual rights with “the state’s obligation to provide for education of responsible citizens who participate in a democratic and pluralistic society.”

No Surprise

American analysts said they were disappointed by the decision, but not surprised.

“I’m never surprised when statism surfaces in Europe, because statism is so deep in Europe,” said Allan Carlson, president of the Howard Center, a Rockford, Illinois-based group that researches the family’s role in society. “European families are increasingly threatened by anti-family bureaucrats and court systems.”

Carlson said the German and EU courts ruled “it was in the children’s best interest to be indoctrinated in the prevailing social order.”

Separating School and State

Founded by Marshall Fritz in 1994, the Alliance for the Separation of School and State, like the Exodus Mandate, actively encourages parents to remove their kids from public schools. Unlike the other groups, the alliance does not limit its work to conservative Protestants. It includes Catholics, Mormons, Muslims, and nonreligious activists among its ranks.

Leaders of the “exodus” movement are not hoping that removing children from public schools will lead those schools to reform themselves.

“We are not urging school reform, because public schools are unrefrom-mable,” Shortt explained. “You can’t do Christian education in a public school.”

Rather, Shortt said, the goal is “to create a new ‘normal’ where Christian parents will see Christian education as the norm.”

Michael Coulter (mrcoulter@gcc.edu) teaches political science at Grove City College in Pennsylvania.
Texas Senate Education Committee hears testimony

By Connie Sadowski

On October 13, the Texas Senate Education Committee heard testimony addressing the mandate given by Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst (R) to evaluate the impact of successful school choice programs on students, parents, and teachers.

“The growing movement to let parents have more say in where, and how, their children are taught is healthy for public education,” said state Sen. Kyle Janek (R-Houston), a member of the education committee. “What is needed is for government to stop standing in the way of this much-needed discussion.”

The Senate committee, in preparation for the legislative session to begin January 9, invited attorneys to testify on the constitutionality of public funding of vouchers, as well as experts to explain the pros and cons of school choice programs and charter schools.

State Sen. Florence Shapiro (R-Plano), the education committee chair, said she will make sure her committee’s focus is on “what is truly in the best interest of the child,” by working on a plan to ensure Texas schoolchildren who are not succeeding will have better choices, either at another public school or a private one.

The committee’s report, due in December, will be subject to approval by a majority vote of the committee and will include recommended statutory or agency rulemaking changes and fiscal cost estimates.

Improving Communities

The impact of school choice is epitomized by the privately funded Horizon Program in San Antonio, said its founder, Robert Aguirre, at the hearing.

The program, currently in its eighth year, reached a peak in 2003-04, when it enrolled 2,032 students representing 15.8 percent of the Edgewood Independent School District (EISD). Any student in Edgewood ISD—the district with the lowest per-capita and household incomes in San Antonio—can use a privately funded Horizon voucher worth $3,600 to $4,700 to attend a private school or transfer to a public school.

Vouchers have been proven to revive inner-city neighborhoods, spur new housing starts, and increase the tax base for public school districts, Aguirre said. EISD’s taxable property value per pupil increased from $29,893 in 1997-98, when the Horizon program began, to $50,550 in 2003-04, he said.

Before Horizon, Aguirre said, this area of San Antonio had no new home starts since 1955. He attributed the increase to new home builders who began advertising “education vouchers as a benefit of home purchase.” In addition, he testified, vouchers encourage districts to be more interested in parents’ opinions.

When the EISD heard the Horizon program was forming, the district hired a professional polling company that “queried its families door to door and asked how the public school system could better serve them,” Aguirre said.

Choosing Students

School choice opponents also testified at the hearing. Kathy Miller, president of the Texas Freedom Network, an Austin-based organization of clergy and community leaders that has historically lobbied against vouchers, testified private and religious schools that accept tax dollars through ‘voucher schemes aren’t required to accept all students who wish to attend.

“If a child lives in a neighborhood and walks through the doors of the public school,” said Miller, “the public school will educate that child. (It) doesn’t ask if they have a B average, and they don’t ask if their parents are motivated. It doesn’t ask if they have transportation to and from, and it doesn’t ask if they can bring their lunch. They teach them.”

Janek asked Miller whether magnet schools—public schools with selective admissions requirements based on academic or performing arts abilities—“bother” her.

Because magnets are part of the public accountability system and “aren’t taking money out of the public education pot,” Miller said it’s OK if magnet schools are selective while accepting public funds.

Preferring Public Schools

Houston lawyer Kaye DeWalt, formerly an attorney for the Houston Independent School District, urged the committee to consider the school choices already in place in the public school system.

Without identifying specific legal repercussions, DeWalt cautioned the committee that any plan for publicly funded vouchers should not include sectarian schools. DeWalt exercised school choice, she said, when her own children were enrolled in magnet schools.

“I am a living witness that [magnet] schools work and they do provide school choice,” DeWalt said.

Charter schools, which enroll 90,000 students in 340 schools statewide, with 11 more to open in 2007, are becoming more popular, DeWalt said, because parents have a desire to “exercise what they perceive as choice.” Smaller class sizes provided the knowledge that some children just function better in different environments also make charters popular in Texas, DeWalt concluded.

Sure of Constitutionality

According to testimony presented by Institute for Justice staff attorney David Roland, “nothing in the federal constitution or the Texas constitution should prevent the Texas Legislature from providing state-funded scholarships” to a private or public school.

“There is no constitutional barrier to religious schools’ participation in a school choice program,” said Roland, so long as the legislation “neither encourages or discourages religion, but merely permits parents to choose a religious school for their children from among other public and private options.

“If the Texas Legislature gives low-income parents the opportunity to choose religious schools for their children,” Roland continued, the constitution would not be violated as long as parents are given choices “from among a range of public schools and other private schools—choices that wealthy parents already enjoy.”

Connie Sadowski (connie@ceo.austin.org) directs the Education Options Resource Center at the Austin CEO Foundation.

Moving Forward

Ninety-nine percent of Horizon kids finish high school, compared to the EISD’s 50 percent graduation rate, Aguirre said. Ninety percent of Horizon kids have gone on to higher education, compared to 53 percent statewide and 35 percent in EISD.

At the hearing, state Sen. Mario Gallegos (D-Houston) disputed Aguirre’s claim that parents like vouchers, saying his constituents in Houston don’t want them. Aguirre disagreed, citing an April 2005 survey conducted by a Democratic pollster that showed 76 percent of Texas Hispanics want school choice, as do 72 percent of Houston’s Hispanics.

Gallegos did not return later requests for information concerning when he last polled his constituency about vouchers.

Testifying for Choice

Though low-income parents found it difficult to attend the hearing on a workday, said Ken Hoagland, spokesperson for an Austin-based advocacy group, “more people will be interested in parents’ opinions.

During the hearing’s public testimony portion, numerous parents testified they want to choose their child’s school.

Aimee Cantu, a single mother of a 9-year-old student in the Horizon program, testified that her son’s voucher boosted her confidence as a parent, “because I can now decide what is best for my child regardless of my economic status.”

“On October 13, the Texas Senate Education Committee heard testimony addressing the mandate given by Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst to evaluate the impact of successful school choice programs on students, parents, and teachers.”

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Memo: Policy of the Day


The Heartland Institute’s free online research databases. Point your Web browser to http://www.policybot.org and search for document #20151.

INTERNET INFO
National K-12 Summit Highlights Milwaukee Success

By Matt Warner

School choice and charter school advocates from across the country gathered in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in early October for the State Policy Network’s (SPN) first-of-its-kind K-12 Education Reform Summit.

The summit, held October 4-5, was co-sponsored by the Alliance for School Choice and the Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation.

“One of the summit goals was to re-energize school choice advocates working in the trenches for real reforms,” said SPN President Tracie Sharp. SPN is a professional service organization for America’s state-based, free-market think tank community.

For local school choice advocates in Wisconsin, the summit was an opportunity to share Milwaukee’s success story. Earlier in the year, school choice proponents were victorious in their efforts to raise the enrollment cap for the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program to 22,500 students.

“The summit gave us the chance to talk with more than 400 activists about the positive impact of parent choice on families, public schools, and the community.”

SUSAN MITCHELL
PRESIDENT
SCHOOL CHOICE WISCONSIN

“Too few people understand that giving families educational options is key to the success of our cities,” said Susan Mitchell, president of School Choice Wisconsin, an advocacy group based in the city. “The summit gave us the chance to talk with more than 400 activists about the positive impact of parent choice on families, public schools, and the community.”

Free to Create

Summit attendees were treated to tours of several schools participating in the voucher program, located in some of Milwaukee’s poorest and most crime-ridden neighborhoods. For some school administrators, locations like these are critical to their mission.

“We had the chance to move the school, but we decided we needed to stay. The kids we serve are from this neighborhood. What kind of message would it send to say, ‘We want to educate you, but we want to take you out of your neighborhood?’” said Alvaro Garcia-Velez, president of Notre Dame Middle School (NDMS), a 10-year-old, all-girls school whose slogan is “Girls Rule!” NDMS accepts public-funded vouchers for eligible students.

Summit attendee Chris Derry, president of Kentucky’s Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions, was encouraged by the visit to the schools.

“Seeing Milwaukee’s inner-city schools firsthand was an eye-opener for me,” Derry said. “Once you’ve seen an orderly learning environment in the midst of urban chaos, you can’t say vouchers won’t work outside Milwaukee.”

Allowing Innovation

After learning in 1996 that juvenile crime in Milwaukee doubles between the hours of 3 p.m. and 7 p.m., García-Velez and his wife, NDMS Principal Mary García-Velez, instituted a mandatory after-school program that keeps students busy, active, and safe until 6 p.m. each day. García-Velez attributes part of the school’s success, evidenced by its waiting list for enrollment, to the freedom he has to be creative with such programs.

“I think a lot of people get into education thinking they will have flexibility to try new things, but unfortunately it is often the case that new ideas get squashed,” García-Velez said.

In addition to offering after-school programming and summer camps, NDMS makes an effort to monitor its students beyond middle school. If students have academic or attendance trouble in later grades, the school intervenes by offering continued inclusion in the after-school program and working with students’ families to encourage school attendance.

Of NDMS’s 152 graduates to date, 95 percent have graduated from high school, and 76 percent have gone on to college. According to the June 22, 2006 edition of Education Week, the Milwaukee Public Schools system graduates 43.1 percent of its students.

NDMS receives $6,500 per student through the public-funded voucher program, well below the average state spending of $10,367 on each public school student during the 2004-05 school year.

Coming Together

According to SPN, 185 organizations from 44 states were represented at the conference.

The large turnout reflects a growing movement of education reformers seeking to give parents more control over their children’s education. According to The Heritage Foundation’s “School Choice: 2006 Progress Report,” 12 states and the District of Columbia now have a total of 21 school choice programs for K-12 education.

The report’s author, Heritage Foundation policy analyst Dan Lips, attended the summit.

Lips said, “2006 was a successful year for school choice, and the Milwaukee education reform summit really showed how momentum is building across the nation. It provided an important opportunity for researchers and school choice advocates from around the country to share ideas and compare strategies. That kind of collaboration and information sharing will pay dividends in 2007 and beyond.”

The summit had three strategic core objectives: leadership training for the school reform movement, coalition building among like-minded reform groups, and networking opportunities for peer learning.

Matt Warner (mwarner@alec.org) is the American Legislative Exchange Council’s Education Task Force director.
High School, College Graduates Lack Basic and Applied Skills, Employers Say

By Krista Kafer

High school and college graduates lack basic and applied skills, say business leaders, according to two surveys released in October.

On October 2, the Conference Board, a global business membership and research organization, released the results of its survey of 431 employers on recently hired high school and college graduates.

While basic knowledge and skills such as reading comprehension and mathematics were deemed important, employers said applied skills—such as work ethic, communication, collaboration, and critical thinking—are even more essential to workplace success.

According to the survey, new job entrants lack both.

“High school and college graduates lack basic and applied skills, say business leaders, according to two surveys released in October.”

Losing Jobs

Linda Barrington, the Conference Board’s director of management research, said her group embarked on the study because they hear a continual “drumbeat about the shortage of skilled workers” from businesses nationwide. In a global hiring environment, she noted, employers can hire qualified workers from other countries when they cannot find them domestically.

“Employers make decisions based on perception, and when workers are seen as deficient in skills, that will affect where [businesses] look for employees and their willingness to look out of the [United States],” Barrington said. Americans are an expensive workforce, she noted, so “we have to be that much better.”

When there is a mismatch between the skills needed and the skills at hand, Americans lose their competitiveness in a global market, Barrington said.

Lacking Skills

The Conference Board found a significant mismatch between the skills employers require and those graduates have. In the survey, 70 percent said high school graduates lack applied skills, and 40 percent said they lack basic skills in the reading, writing, and math needed for the job.

The majority of employers surveyed, 81 percent, believe new hires to be deficient in written communication. High school graduates lack grammar and spelling skills, as well as the ability to write memos, letters, and technical reports, the respondents said.

The lack of critical thinking ability is also a problem, according to 70 percent of respondents. Most respondents said high school graduates are adequately prepared in terms of information technology application and the ability to work in teams and with diverse people.

Planning Ahead

In general, most employers said two- and four-year college graduates have adequate job preparation, though few believe them to be “excellently” prepared.

A diploma doesn’t guarantee good writing, for example, according to the survey. Nearly half of the respondents see their employees with associate’s degrees as being deficient in writing.

Survey participants said creativity and innovation will be their two most pressing future needs, and 63 percent believe facility with foreign languages will be important.

“All stakeholders (business, educators, and community members) should consider methods of enhancing important workplace skills” by creating opportunities for students to participate in internships, work-study programs, summer jobs, job shadowing, mentoring, and on-the-job training, the study authors wrote.

They recommend stakeholders encourage creative thinking, development of leadership skills, and teamwork. The authors also suggest more discussion among stakeholders and new research, including the creation of case studies of successful programs and evaluation methods.

Getting a Picture

An October 12 report by the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education (MBAE), based on three focus groups of 23 employers statewide, reported similar findings.

According to the report, high school graduates lack basic and applied or “soft” skills such as communications (oral, written, and presentation), basic math and computer application, problem-solving, and even basic work behavior (work ethic and etiquette).

The MBAE wrote the report to give education reformers a clear picture of the deficiencies among new workforce entrants, said MBAE Managing Director Linda M. Noonan. Massachusetts is in the midst of a statewide discussion about what students need to know and be able to do when they graduate from high school in order to succeed in the workforce or higher education.

“We wanted to define from the employer perspective what work readiness skills are needed from graduates,” said Noonan.

The MBAE recommends schools:

• require all high school graduates to participate in internships, paid employment, or community service;
• increase students’ public speaking opportunities and require an oral exam to prove speaking skills; and
• engage students in teamwork and activities that impose deadlines and penalties for tardiness.

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better educational opportunities and services.

Under the legislation, parents would not have to hire a lawyer or go to court before sending their kids to another school. If it passes, the scholarship program will begin in fall 2007.

Lee pre-filed the legislation in September to kick-start discussion about the bill, which he will officially introduce in the legislature in January. He said early intervention is crucial in helping students overcome learning difficulties and that if his bill doesn't pass, many special-needs students will be stuck in schools where they aren't learning and progressing as they should be.

“Kentucky state Rep. Stan Lee (R-Lexington) proposed a school choice bill for special-needs students this fall. If it passes, it will be the first school choice program of any kind in the state.”

Saving Money
The proposed school choice program could save taxpayers an estimated $200 million over the next decade, according to a recent report, “Enable the Disabled: An Analysis of the Kentucky Students with Special Needs Scholarship Program.” The report was written by Vicki E. Murray, Ph.D., an education policy analyst in Arizona, and Arwynn Mattix, a research assistant at the Goldwater Institute, a free-market think tank in Phoenix.

The report, released on November 6 by the Bluegrass Institute for Public Policy Solutions (BIPPS), a free-market think tank in Kentucky, examines the bill's potential financial impact on Kentucky’s public school system.

Jim Waters, BIPPS’ director of policy and communications, said he has heard from many parents of special-needs students who are frustrated with the current public school system's use of a one-size-fits-all method to educate their children.

Waters said Kentucky’s learning-disabled children have been ignored and underserved. Kentucky has 109,000 able-bodied children have been ignored and underserved. Kentucky has 109,000 able-bodied

Arguing Premises
Under Lee’s program, special-needs students would get scholarships equal to the amount of money the state guarantees for every pupil, plus the extra money added on for each special-needs student.

School scholarship programs are offered in other states, including Arizona, Florida, Ohio, and Utah. A September 19 Lexington Herald-Leader editorial argued Lee’s proposed program is “an empty promise” and claimed that if proponents “cared about special-needs kids, they’d be pushing to improve the services and offerings in public schools.” The editorial also suggested the bill could result in a financial burden for public school districts because public transportation would have to be provided for students attending private schools.

Resolving Problems
Proponents of the legislation counter the scholarship program could reduce public school districts’ spending by nearly $50 million in administrative costs each year, by reducing the number of situations in which school staffers and lawyers face off with special-needs students’ parents to resolve disputes about where students can go for the best education. Those disputes sometimes drag on for years.

“One of the things that we hear a lot from education officials here is how much it costs to educate special-needs students,” Waters said. “Well, they should be on board with this bill then, because they’re not going to have the responsibility of providing education for many of them if the bill passes. Public schools still would receive federal and local funding under the program, Waters noted.

“Kentucky’s learning-disabled children have been ignored and underserved. Kentucky has 109,000 able-bodied children have been ignored and underserved. Kentucky has 109,000 able-bodied

Paying More
About 2,500 special-needs children in Kentucky attend private schools, and about half of those students are there because the students’ school districts sent them there to get a better education than what the students’ public schools provided.

“One of the things that we hear a lot from education officials here is how much it costs to educate special-needs students. Well, they should be on board with this bill then, because they’re not going to have the responsibility of providing education for many of them.”

JIM WATERS
DIRECTOR OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS
BLUEGRASS INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC POLICY SOLUTIONS

According to articles Lee has written, some parents of special-needs students pay up to $13,000—in addition to their tax dollars that go to the public school system they don’t use—to send their kids to private schools to get better education opportunities and improved services.

Waters said, “We just think that all parents of special-needs children should at least have that choice.”

“With the proposed scholarship program, parents and educators would no longer have to spend so much of their time filling out paperwork or navigating their way through bureaucratic red tape,” Murray said. “Instead, parents could concentrate on their children, and teachers could focus their talents back on the classroom.”

Hiring Lawyers
Lee points out that not everyone has the money to send a special-needs student to a private school or to hire a lawyer to fight a student’s public school district so the student may go to another school.

“Hiring a lawyer and taking time off from work to sue their children’s school district is not a viable option for most Kentucky families,” Murray agreed.

The Herald-Leader argued that one problem with Lee’s proposed scholarship program is that “Kentucky’s constitution prohibits spending public money on private schools.”

Murray disagreed. “Denying special-needs students appropriate services or requiring dissatisfied parents to pay for services [that] their children should already be receiving from the public education system is also contrary to federal and state law,” she said.

With 2,500 special-needs students already attending private schools, Waters wondered how Lee’s proposed scholarship program could be considered unconstitutional.

“If it is, what’s going to happen to those 2,500 students?” Waters asked. “Is the judge going to say they have to go back to the public schools?”

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Student Life-Planning Magazine Launches New and Improved Web Site

Offers education-minded teens a central location for college planning

The Next Step Magazine, a college, career, and life-planning magazine for high school students, announced on October 24 the launch of nextstepmag.com (http://www.nextstepmag.com). The redesigned, more user-friendly site is positioned as a central location and comprehensive source for education-minded teens looking for the latest news, trends, and tips about college planning.

“When we decided to update the site, we polled students to find out exactly what they wanted,” said Chris Roberts, vice president of marketing and interactive programs for Next Step Publishing, Inc. “As a result, the new site offers a seamless online experience that marries the information students need for college planning with fun topics and message boards that will entice and engage them.”

“So the Web site offers students that register opportunities to win scholarships and other prizes and to enter writing contests. “By offering more user-generated content, we will enhance our relationship with current ‘Next Steppers,’ expand brand awareness to a broader teen audience, and importantly, provide more opportunities for students to offer advice and share stories with one another,” added Roberts.

In addition to providing objective content for students, the site has a section for parents and guidance counselors. The goal is to offer adults networking opportunities and help build relationships among all parties involved in the college planning process.

“Our research shows that teens are going both online and offline for information and want multiple platforms to receive content,” added Roberts. “The Web site and The Next Step Magazine will each have their own unique features, yet have synergy, driving traffic to one another.”

About The Next Step Magazine
The Next Step Magazine is distributed in more than 20,500 high schools and read by more than 900,000 students in 50 states. Next Step Publishing also produces higher-education planning guides for parents, transfer students, adults, and school counselors, and a bilingual Latino edition. The Next Step Magazine is headquartered in Rochester, New York, where the first issue was published in May 1995.
Federal High School Scholarship Plan Proposed

Bipartisan coalition supports Senate plan

By Dan Lips

In September, U.S. Sens. Jim DeMint (R-SC) and Barack Obama (D-IL) introduced S. 3995, the Education Opportunity Act, to provide college-level opportunities for disadvantaged high school students. The measure offers a new, reformed method of providing low-income students with the opportunity to take Advanced Placement (AP) classes and other advanced courses. The DeMint-Obama proposal would give qualifying low-income high school students the opportunity to take college-level courses at no extra cost.

"A Step Forward"

School choice advocates hailed the move as a step forward.

"Senator DeMint has proven to be a friend to parental choice in education throughout his tenure in Congress," said Don Soifer, executive vice president of the Lexington Institute, a free-market think tank in Arlington, Virginia. "He recognizes that if Washington is going to continue to increase its role in public education in this country, finding ways to give more and better choices to poor families in underperforming schools is an important priority."

The program would essentially extend the opportunities available through the higher education Pell Grant program to high school students to take college-level courses. The Pell Grant program currently provides nearly $12 billion annually to approximately five million higher education students to assist with tuition costs. The DeMint-Obama proposal would make federal funds available to qualifying low-income high school students.

Additional Opportunities

"Our bill would significantly expand college-level opportunities for low-income high school students, and teach these students that success in school means success in life," DeMint explained. "This legislation will help keep our high school students in school by raising their expectations and showing them they can do college-level work."

Federal policymakers are looking for ways to give disadvantaged students greater access to AP courses and higher-level instruction. Earlier this year, the Bush administration proposed funding for programs that provide greater access to math and science instruction and AP courses for disadvantaged children, in its American Competitiveness Initiative. DeMint suggested the Education Opportunity Act would be a cost-effective way of accomplishing the same goal of providing higher education instruction to low-income students.

"In September, U.S. Sens. Jim DeMint (R-SC) and Barack Obama (D-IL) introduced S. 3995, the Education Opportunity Act, to provide college-level opportunities for disadvantaged high school students."

While we have expanded low-income students' access to AP classes, I believe we are missing another vital avenue to increase college-level opportunities for those students," DeMint said. "Our bill would allow students to take advantage of college-level classes at no extra cost or burden to their high school, while at the same time exposing the student to the hundreds of classes at their local community college."

Future Possibilities

Soifer pointed to the importance of the bipartisan support for the measure.

"It is encouraging to see Senator Obama acknowledge that students from poor families often do not see their educational needs met by their neighborhood government high school," Soifer explained. "Those students deserve more choices and more portability for their public education dollars. S. 3995 would give many of those families an interesting new educational option."

But a broader choice plan would certainly make more of a difference," Soifer added.

DeMint said the Education Opportunity Act would be an important step toward greater parental choice in education.

"The more we show low-income students and parents that education choices benefit them directly, the better our chances are of expanding education choices in the future," DeMint said.

Time Constraints

Facing a short calendar for the remainder of the year and the 109th Congress, legislative action on the bill probably will not occur until 2007, even though the bipartisan measure was introduced in September.

"We are unlikely to find time to bring up this legislation as a stand-alone bill this year," DeMint explained. "However, it’s important we begin the debate over innovative education solutions, and this legislation is one more valuable option to empower students and parents with choices to meet individual student needs."

"I look forward to working with the [Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions] committee next year to make this legislation a reality," DeMint said.

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In Tutoring, As in Teaching, Structured Programs Work Best

By George Clowes

A structured curriculum is one of the key features of proven high-quality tutoring procedures. So concludes a new book, co-authored by tutoring expert Edward E. Gordon, that reviews both tutoring research and theories of learning.

This finding for tutoring parallels what University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee researchers reported for classroom instruction five years ago: that higher-achieving teachers use explicit instruction rather than student-centered experiential learning.

Tutoring has become a high-growth industry over the past five years, since the 2001 passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). That law identified “supplemental educational services” (SES), such as private tutoring, as one of the options that persistently failing public schools could use federal funds to offer parents.

Although a maximum of $2 billion of Title I funds could be directed to SES, current spending is about $400 million and growing at about 20 percent a year, according to Tim Wiley, an analyst at Boston-based Edventures, a leading information-services provider for the education marketplace.

The private tutoring industry, excluding SES, has a long-term growth rate of 4 to 8 percent, according to Wiley, and served 1.9 million K-12 students in 2004-05 on revenues of $2.2 billion.

Finding Tutors

To help families find reliable tutors, in 2002 Gordon drew on his 35 years of experience in tutoring to produce a timely, useful book, Tutor Quest: Finding Effective Education for Children and Adults.

Now, concerned about ineffective tutoring programs that fail to raise student achievement, he has co-authored The Tutoring Revolution, which describes what research says about tutoring best practices.

“[T]he new book’s target audience is school district administrators, teachers, tutors, education policymakers, and researchers.”

Gordon’s co-authors are Ronald R. Morgan, an educational psychology professor at Loyola University, Chicago; Charles O’Malley, an independent education consultant; and Judith Ponticelli, professor of educational leadership at the University of South Florida, Lakeland.

“Tutoring needs to be based on solid research, not commercial advertising hype,” Gordon explained in an interview for this story. “There’s no recognition that there is a body of research that actually shows that tutoring works. This is the first research book ever published on tutoring, and it begins to show what works.”

Aiming at Professionals

Unlike Tutor Quest, which was aimed at parents, the new book’s target audience is school district administrators, teachers, tutors, education policymakers, and researchers.

The first two chapters provide a historical perspective on tutoring, with particular emphasis on the policy changes wrought by NCLB. The next two chapters describe different theories in educational psychology and their application to tutoring, teaching, and tutoring.

However, many of the ideas covered—such as pedagogy of place, constructivism, and postmodernism—add little to an understanding of the proven tutoring practices discussed later in the book.

Making it Work

The authors then review tutoring research and proven methods. The last two chapters of the book provide details of trade-practice standards for tutoring, model state regulations, and suggested areas for further research.

The authors note that while many citations of tutoring exist in the education literature, few involve empirical research findings. Most are simply case studies, testimonials, or narratives.

The most important research finding identified in the book is that “well structured [tutoring] programs work best,” a conclusion reported by many reviewers, including Barak Rosenshine and Norma Furst.

This finding suggests the six-function teaching model developed by Rosenshine and Robert Stevens for classroom instruction is equally applicable to tutoring. (See sidebar.)

Assessing Effectiveness

In the book’s most important chapter, the authors ask, “Has Tutoring Worked?” In an all-too-brief response, they describe 12 proven tutoring procedures and list 10 key components of high-quality tutoring programs. These tutoring “best practices” include:

• Design and implement highly structured programs, usually with specifically crafted curriculum scripts.
• Don’t focus on narrow, isolated instructional activities. The use of a tutoring curriculum script with a checklist helps diagnose specific skill deficiencies and identify poor learners.
• There should be a strong connection between what the student knows and the skills that need to be learned. Again, this often involves the use of a tutoring curriculum script covering a well-defined set of skills.
• Tutoring at the student’s home often maximizes long-term student achievement. Home-based tutoring allows remediation of student skills and helps parents improve the learning environment in the home.
• Spend an adequate amount of time on task. Time is needed to assess which skills are missing, to change study habits, and to improve motivation.

“Home-based tutoring allows remediation of student skills and helps parents improve the learning environment in the home.”

“If we now know what works, we should begin training teachers at the undergraduate level in how to tutor using these proven procedures,” Gordon said in an interview. “And the way to get at more of the things that work is to do more practitioner-based research.”

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http://www.aei.org

American Legislative Exchange Council
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Washington, DC 20006
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fax 202/466-3801
http://www.alec.org

Americans for Limited Government
240 Waukegan Road #200
Glenview, IL 60025
phone 847/657-7251
fax 847/657-7502
http://www.getliberty.org

Americans for Prosperity Foundation
1726 M Street NW - 10th Floor
Washington, DC 20036
phone 202/349-5880
http://www.americansforprosperity.org

Cato Institute
1000 Massachusetts Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20001
phone 202/842-0200
fax 202/842-3490
http://www.cato.org

CEO America
P.O. Box 330
901 McClain Road #802
Bentonville, AR 72712-0303
phone 501/273-9657
fax 501/273-9362
http://www.ceoamerica.org

Children’s Scholarship Fund
75 57th Street
New York, NY 10019
phone 212/752-8555
fax 212/750-4292
http://www.issf.org

Citizens for a Sound Economy
1250 West First Street #300
Claremont, CA 91711
phone 909/621-6825
fax 909/626-8724
http://www.cse.org

Citizens for Educational Freedom
933 Claydon Highway
St. Louis, MO 63124
phone 314/997-6361
fax 314/997-6321
http://www.educational-freedom.org

The Claremont Institute
250 West First Street #300
Claremont, CA 91711
phone 909/621-6825
fax 909/626-8724
http://www.claremont.org

The Edison Project
521 5th Avenue - 15th Floor
New York, NY 10175
phone 212/1600
fax 212/309-1604
http://www.edisonproject.com

Education Leaders Council
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Washington, DC 20036
phone 202/822-9000
fax 202/822-5077
http://www.edeforum.org/index.html

Education Policy Institute
4401-A Connecticut Avenue NW
Box 294
Washington, DC 20008
phone 202/244-7535
fax 202/244-7584
http://www.edpolicy.org

Empower America
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Washington, DC 20006
phone 202/452-8200
fax 202/833-0388
http://www.empower.org

Excellent Education for Everyone
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fax 973/273-7222
http://www.rej3.org

Fraser Institute
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Vancouve, BC Canada V6J 3G7
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fax 604/688-8530
http://www.fraserinstitute.ca

Greater Educational Opportunities Foundation
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fax 317/282-4712
http://www.geofoundation.org

The Heartland Institute
190 S. State Street #903
Chicago, IL 60603
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fax 312/377-5000
http://www.theheartland.org

The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue NE
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phone 202/546-4000
fax 202/546-8328
http://www.heartland.org

Hillsdale College
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Hillsdale, MI 49242
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fax 517/437-3923
http://www.hillsdale.edu

Home Schooling Legal Defense Association
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Purcellville, VA 20134
phone 540/338-5600
fax 540/338-2733
http://www.hslda.org

The Hudson Institute
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phone 202/974-2400
fax 202/974-2410
http://www.hudson.org

The Independent Institute
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fax 510/663-0400
http://www.independent.org

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Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881
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fax 414/288-6199
http://www.it4l.org

Institute for Justice
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Washington, DC 20006
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fax 202/955-1329
http://www.instituteforjustice.org

John F. Kennedy School of Government
T308 Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138
phone 617/495-7976
fax 617/496-4424
http://www.data.fas.harvard.edu/ppeg/

KIPP Foundation
881 Ponce de Leon Avenue #1
Atlanta, GA 30306
phone 404/541-9975
http://www.kipp.org

Landmark Legal Foundation
3100 Broadway #151
Kansas City, MO 64111
phone 816/31-5559
fax 816/31-1150
http://www.landmarklegal.org

The Lexington Institute
1635 North Fort Meyer Drive #325
Arlington, VA 22209
phone 703/522-5828
fax 703/522-5837
http://www.lexington.org

Manhattan Institute
52 Vanderbilt Avenue
New York, NY 10017
phone 212/359-7000
fax 212/599-3494
http://www.manhattan-institute.org

Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation
P.O. Box 82078
One American Square #2440
Indianapolis, IN 46282
phone 317/681-0945
http://www.reason.org

Philanthropy Roundtable
1150 17th Street NW #503
Washington, DC 20036
phone 202/822-8333
fax 202/822-8325
http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org

Reason Public Policy Institute
3415 South Sepulveda Boulevard #400
Los Angeles, CA 90034-6064
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fax 310/391-4935
http://www.reason.org

School Choice Ohio
21 East State Street
Columbus, OH 43215
614/223-1555
http://www.sciohio.org

School Choice Wisconsin
2025 North Summit Avenue #103
Milwaukee, WI 53202
phone 414/319-9160
fax 414/765-0220
http://www.schoolchoiceinfo.org

State Policy Network
13101 Preston Road #403
Dallas, TX 75240
phone 972/233-6676
fax 972/233-6696
http://www.srn.org

Thomas B. Fordham Foundation
1627 K Street NW #800
Washington, DC 20006
phone 202/223-5452
fax 202/223-9226
http://www.edexcellence.net

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To request additions or corrections to, or deletions from, this list, please contact:
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School Choice on Audio

Audio recordings from the 2006 Educational Choice Speaker Series are now available online.

The luncheon series is hosted by the Illinois School Choice Initiative (ISCI), a project of The Heartland Institute. The mission of the initiative is to enable all parents in Illinois to choose quality schools for their children. For more information, please contact Ralph Conner, government relations manager for The Heartland Institute, at 312/377-4000, email conner@heartland.org.

Since January, the ISCI has hosted a monthly luncheon at the Metropolitan Club of Chicago, where business and civic leaders and school choice supporters have heard from some of the movement’s most important leaders, including Robert Enlow of the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation, Rebeca Nieves-Huffman of the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options, and Lawrence Patrick III of the Black Alliance for Educational Options.

The audio recordings can be listened to online or downloaded to an iPod or MP3 player by subscribing to the Educational Choice Speaker Series Podcast. Visit The Heartland Institute’s online audio center at http://www.fromtheheartland.org/live/audio.html and scroll down to the ISCI Educational Choice Speaker series.

THE FOLLOWING PRESENTATIONS ARE AVAILABLE:

JANUARY: George Clowes, The Heartland Institute
On January 19, Clowes kicked off the new monthly Educational Choice Speaker Series with a talk titled, “Competition as an Effective Education Reform: What Works and What’s Ahead.”

FEBRUARY: Ken Johnson, Milwaukee Public Schools
On February 16, Kenneth L. Johnson, Milwaukee School Board president, addressed “Milwaukee Public School Reform: Rethinking of Parents as Our Customers.”

MARCH: Virginia Gentles, Florida Department of Education
On March 16, Virginia Gentles, executive director of the Florida Department of Education’s Office of Independent Education and Parental Choice, described the school choice programs available to parents in the Sunshine State.

APRIL: Lawrence Patrick, BAEO
On April 20, Lawrence Patrick III of the Black Alliance for Educational Options (BAEO) addressed the need for educational choice for black parents and students.

MAY: Rebeca Nieves-Huffman, Hispanic CREO
On May 18, Rebeca Nieves-Huffman addressed the education crisis and how it affects Hispanic children. Huffman is president and CEO of the Hispanic Council for Reform and Educational Options (Hispanic CREO).

JUNE: Robert Enlow, Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation
On June 15, Robert Enlow, executive director of the Milton & Rose D. Friedman Foundation, gave an overview of the school choice movement, assessing the strength of the movement.

JULY: Lisa Snell, Reason Foundation
On July 27, Lisa Snell, director of education and child welfare at the California-based Reason Foundation, spoke about the pitfalls of universal preschool and the benefits of weighted student funding as a viable and effective K-12 reform.

SEPTEMBER: David Brennan, White Hat Management
On September 21, David Brennan’s speech, “The U.S. Education System Is Perfectly Aligned with Cuba and North Korea: Do We Really Treasure Individual Rights? Don’t We Value the Power of Consumer Choice?” stressed the importance of innovation in our education system.

OCTOBER: Clint Bolick, Alliance for School Choice
On October 19, Clint Bolick closed the ISCI’s 2006 Educational Choice Speaker Series with a discussion of school choice cases currently in the courts, and what the future holds.

School Choice on Cable TV

“School Choice,” a cable program featuring presentations from the ISCI’s luncheon series, is broadcast on Comcast’s public access channel in the following suburban Chicago, Illinois communities:

Channel 19: Buffalo Grove, Elk Grove Village, Hoffman Estates, parts of Inverness, Lincolnwood, Maine Township, Morton Grove, New Trier Township, Niles, Northfield, Northfield Township, Palatine, Rolling Meadows, and Wilmette

Channel 35: Arlington Heights, Bartlett, Des Plaines, Glenview, Golf, Hanover Park, Mount Prospect, Northbrook, Park Ridge, Prospect Heights, Schaumburg, Skokie, Streamwood, and Wheeling

School Choice on DVD

DVD recordings from the 2006 Educational Choice Speaker Series are also available for purchase.

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